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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

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Is IT NOT true that a good deal of space has been occupied by the editors of our religious papers in statements intended to turn opinion against those who are called "higher critics"? The attitude of many has been polemic in the extreme. One wonders sometimes whether it has been altogether Christianlike.

*HIGHER
CRITICISM AS
LITERARY STUDY*

Has it ever occurred to those who have written these polemic statements, and to those who have read them, that perhaps the great duty of the church is to train higher critics rather than to fight them? If, for all time, we could drop the phrase "higher criticism" and substitute the phrase "literary study," it is probable that there would not be any serious difference in opinion on this question. And yet it is true that higher criticism is only literary study.

The literary study of the Old Testament has had a long and honorable career. The students, or to use the other term, the critics, have been for the most part good, pious, and honest men. Their only desire has been to find the truth and to accept it when found. In the great majority of cases these students have shown a kind spirit and a calm judgment. The men as men do not deserve the harsh and unkind statements which are often made concerning them.

*THE SPIRIT OF
THE CRITICS*

What may be said of them as scholars? Ordinarily, we may say again, their only desire has been the desire for discovery of truth. The mistakes of one generation have been recognized and corrected in the next. No literary student that is "higher critic" today claims that final conclusions have been reached. The work is in the same situation as that of medicine. No medical student thinks that today the doors are shut to further discoveries. It is also true that in biblical study as in medicine much new material has come to light during the last fifty years and consequently many discoveries have been made.

The number of theological professors, religious editors, and ministers who are in sympathy with a rational and conservative literary study, that is, criticism of the Bible, is larger than may be supposed. But it remains true that a still larger number will continue to remain stationary and to cast doubt upon the honesty and piety of those who are more energetic and more scientific, and who for this reason are pushing along in lines of further investigation. Just as the majority of the medical profession today are satisfied with the medical training of their ancestors, so the majority of the clergy are satisfied with the theological training and views of their ancestors. They are satisfied to receive and accept an old interpretation and they are equally well satisfied to ignore the best results of exploration and excavation.

But the number of those is surely increasing who recognize the biblical bearings of the various lines of general oriental study pursued with unceasing vigor and success in the present day. Yet even they have hardly grasped the importance to biblical work of this kind of study and the timeliness of the occupation of the field by Christian scholars. May we be permitted to describe somewhat in detail the salient features of this new outlook?

During the last fifty years the excavations in Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Palestine, and the explorations in Arabia have

opened up an entirely new field. The ignorance and confusion which prevailed in the study of the historical portions of the Old

LANGUAGE Testament before the discovery of the Babylonian-Assyrian inscriptions was lamentable but not to be avoided. Before this period there did not exist satisfactory lexicographical and historical material on the basis of which either the language or the text of the Old Testament could be scientifically studied. The Hebrew literature itself to which we have access is limited in extent and yet covers a historical period vast in its extent. We are often at a loss as to the original pronunciation of the Hebrew. The original text of the Hebrew books in many cases is uncertain. All these and many other facts which might be suggested show that for an understanding of the Old Testament we must have help from outside sources.

This help a kind Providence has now placed within our reach. But there must be men who will undertake severe labor in the different fields in which the help has been distributed. *EXPLORATION* The materials which excavation and exploration have already provided must be studied and the results applied. Moreover there are hundreds of important sites to be excavated. Some of the most important mounds of Assyria in the north and of Babylonia in the south have never been touched. Others have been excavated only in part. In Palestine very little has been done and in the Hittite country only two or three mounds have been laid bare. It may truly be said that only the smallest possible portion of the work has yet been finished.

Outside the field of exploration there are many questions to be studied. These are of great interest in themselves and at the same time of great importance to the study of the *QUESTIONS OF ORIGIN* Bible. For example: Is the civilization of the Semitic people really Semitic or is it foreign? Whence came the many customs and institutions which have long been supposed to be peculiar to the Hebrews but which

more recent study has shown to be common to many Semitic nations. What is the exact relationship which exists between the Hebrew accounts of the creation and the deluge and those of the Babylonians? Were the Hebrew borrowed from the Babylonian, or the Babylonian from the Hebrew, or did both go back to an earlier and original common source? Was the Hammurabi dynasty Arabian? Do the results obtained from a study of Glaser's Arabic inscriptions warrant the view of Sayce and Hommel "that the system of name formation which we find in the South Arabian inscriptions was already in existence at the beginning of the second millennium before Christ, and that the numerous personal names ascribed to patriarchal and Mosaic times were in general use at this period and could not have been invented in or after the time of the kings—when a totally different system of nomenclature obtained—and thrown back into antiquity retrospectively"? Shall we with Sayce-Hommel bring Abraham from Ur in southern Babylonia, or with Budde-Kittel from Ur in southern Armenia? Shall we accept the Assyrian system of chronology, and, if so, how shall we harmonize it with the Hebrew? Of what importance are the recently discovered Tel el Amarna tablets for the study of the Old Testament?

There is also much work to be done on the historical inscriptions. Many of the religious texts have never been copied. The psalter of the Babylonians is much more extensive than that of the Hebrew. While the Hebrew has 150 Psalms, the cuneiform literature contains thousands. The Babylonian psalter is rich in penitential psalms and some of these read remarkably like those of the Davidic collection. The astrological tablets and those containing the omens have scarcely been touched, although they occupy an important place in the Babylonian religious literature. The history of the Assyrio-Babylonian religion is still to be written. In the annals of the kings we learn of the court, of the waging of war, of the reception of tribute, of the building of palaces and cities, of the digging of canals and the construction of walls. In the contracts, on the other hand, we come in contact with the

QUESTIONS
OF RELIGION
AND SOCIAL LIFE

people and with the commercial life of the nation. We find the most elaborate system of contracts and receipts, bills of sale, notes, etc. In the letters we meet a different phase of both court and common life. We have the letters of greeting from a subject or a member of the royal family to the king or queen-mother, or from the king to the subject. We have also diplomatic and military reports from generals and governors of provinces; records of the transportation of horses for military purposes, astronomical reports, requests for the service of a physician with a diagnosis of the case; reports from priests, physicians, park commissioners, gardeners—in short, a discussion of all the topics of the day.

These are a few of the more significant lines of scientific Semitic investigation contributing to the knowledge of the Old Testament. The material is increasing every day.

*SHALL
CHRISTIAN
SCHOLARS
OCCUPY THIS
FIELD?*

Scholars will arise in larger numbers to study it and to apply the results of this study in the biblical sphere. The work cannot be done by everybody. Men must be found to devote their lives to the work. Where shall they be found? Will the churches furnish them? Shall Christian men come forward to give themselves to the fullest training in the philology, archæology, history, chronology, and literature of the Semitic peoples and thus to fit themselves for the highest contributions to biblical science? Will the churches encourage them to do this? or is it to be left to those who are not in sympathy with evangelical Christianity? Only scholars and well-trained scholars can adequately fulfil the requirement. Are we to give our sympathy and help to those who in the spirit of Christian self-sacrifice undertake such tasks? This is a vital question. May it be pondered by the leaders among us.